vided, as Mr. Eugene Lyons has put it, 'a fortnight of clowning/[14] In honour of Mr. Shaw's seventy-fifth birthday, which took place while he was in Moscow, a huge meeting was held, fittingly, in the old Nobles' Club, in the, room where so many political prisoners have been tried and convicted. There was at the time a serious food-shortage, and even this privileged audience included some who were on short rations. Mr. Shaw explained in his speech how, before he started off on his trip, he had been warned to provide himself with supplies of tinned food, how he had thrown these emergency supplies out of the train on his way through Poland because he knew that talk of a food shortage in the U.S.S.R. was all nonsense, and how he had never been so overstuffed in his life as since he crossed the Soviet frontier. It was the only thing the Russians were unable to forgive him—that he should have thrown away food instead of bringing it with him to Moscow.

Later, at a Foreign Office reception, according to Mr. Lyons, Lady Astor astonished everyone by suddenly prostrating herself before Litvinov, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs. She had received a telegram, from a Russian Professor in the United States asking her to intercede for his family, who had been detained in the U.S.S.R, Litvinov, much embarrassed by Lady Astor's impulsive gesture, read the telegram and turned irritably away, remarking that the matter was not within his jurisdiction. Undeterred by this rebuff, Lady Astor appealed to other im-

[14] In *Assignment in Utopia:*

'Deftly Shaw skimmed the surface, careful not to break through the lacquer of appearances. If Lady Astor asked too many

questions he neatly slapped her wrist. He judged food conditions by the Metropole menu, collectivisation by the model farm, the Ogpu by die model colony at Bolshovo, socialism by the twittering of attendant sycophants. His performance was not amusing to Russians. It was macabre. The lengthening obscenity of ignorant or indifferent tourists disporting themselves cheerily on the aching body of Russia, seemed summed-up in this cavorting old man, in his blanket endorsement of what he would not understand. He was so taken up with demonstrating how youthful and agile he was that he had no attention to spare for the revolution in practice/